

Task Force B Meeting Summary

Monday, June 12, 2006

Task Force Participants: Janet Cushman – MI Department of Human Services, Giancarlo Guzman – Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health, Jane Marshall (Chair) – Food Bank Council of Michigan, Marla Moss – MI Department of Education, Barb Mutch – Michigan State University Extension, Karla Stratton – MI Department of Community Health.

Additional Participants: Amanda Edmonds – Growing Hope, Lisa Rose Starner – Mixed Greens.

The seventh Task Force B: Improving Access to Fresh and Healthy Foods meeting convened on Monday, June 12, 2006 from 10:00 am – 12:00 in Constitution Hall in Lansing. Council member Jane Marshall chaired the meeting.

Ms. Marshall called the meeting to order and initiated a brief round of introductions. She introduced Lisa Rose Starner, executive director of Mixed Greens in Grand Rapids, and Amanda Edmonds, executive director of Growing Hope in Ypsilanti. Ms. Starner described the work of Mixed Greens with school gardens; their motto is “Growing Kids Who Grow Gardens.” She stated that it is not sufficient to tell children to eat healthy food, when they are faced with so many unhealthy choices in school. The only way that children will eat healthy food is if it is interesting and appealing, and one way to do that is for them to grow the food themselves. Ms. Starner recommended that the state do more to increase the numbers and success of school gardens in order to increase the healthy eating and nutrition of school children.

Ms. Edmonds described the work of Growing Hope, a community and school garden organization in Ypsilanti, MI. Ms. Edmonds also spoke more broadly on the topic of community gardening statewide. There is a new, fairly informal network of community gardens around the state called the Michigan Community and School Garden Coalition. They held their first conference in November 2005, and are planning a second conference for this fall. The Coalition is growing and developing, and Ms. Edmonds noted the diversity and breadth of community gardening initiatives underway around the state. She pointed out that community gardens offer a link to a number of challenges that communities face (especially those of low-income) including problems in: public health and nutrition, economic development, beautification, and community development.

Finally, Council Member Giancarlo Guzman presented on the work of the Detroit Agriculture Network, on whose board he serves. The Detroit Agriculture Network (DAN) consists of a large network of gardens and provides resources and education to support

urban gardeners in Detroit. A recent initiative within DAN is the establishment of fresh produce markets outside of WIC clinics so that Project FRESH clients can use their coupons immediately upon receiving them. This project, thus far, is limited only by the amount of locally grown produce available for sale at these markets.

Task Force participants discussed the policy recommendation options identified by Ms. Starner, Ms. Edmonds and Mr. Guzman. MFPC staff will circulate a recommendation (B11) on the topic of community and school gardens to Task Force participants for feedback.

Recommendation B11: Increase the numbers and success of school, community and urban gardens as a means to increase access to fresh and healthy food.

- a) MDA, in partnership with MSUE and other appropriate organizations, should provide technical assistance and direction to communities and organizations that promote community and urban gardens.
- b) MDE should specifically encourage the installation of school gardens and minimal cooking instruction facilities at every school as part of school wellness policy development and implementation.

The next Task Force B meeting will wrap up the work of task force B and provide an overview of the work of the Michigan Food Policy Council to date. There will be some evaluation of efforts completed, and summaries of work done in other task forces presented by MFPC staff. The next meeting of Task Force B is Monday, July 10, 10am – 12noon, Constitution Hall, Hutchinson Room.